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## Access to MIA Files Being Blocked

**I**n what smells suspiciously like a cover-up, the Defense Intelligence Agency has been blocking members of Congress from scrutinizing its files on sightings of live American prisoners of war in Southeast Asia. And the agency has prevailed on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence to go along with the information blackout.

The puzzling question is: Why does the Pentagon want to hide the many eyewitness reports that indicate American soldiers listed as "missing in action" may, incredibly, still survive in some jungle pesthole more than 10 years after the end of the Vietnam war?

The DIA's primary reason for not letting members of Congress pore through the files on live POW/MIA sightings is that Watergate-era chestnut: "national security." Just how information on American prisoners 10 years after the end of hostilities could jeopardize national security, the Pentagon doesn't begin to say.

A DIA official told us that no member of Congress has flatly been denied access to the POW/MIA files and said the agency has repeatedly briefed Congress on the matter.

But our Capitol Hill sources say the DIA has obstructed representatives who have tried to make a careful examination of the file on a given live sighting. Instead, the DIA offers statistics and generalities in briefings designed to assure Congress that everything is under control.

Faced with this bureaucratic stonewall, 18 Republican House members in July took the

unusual—and largely unnoticed—step of sponsoring a resolution to force the Defense Department to provide "full and complete information regarding the following: all case files, complete with individual DIA analyses concerning reports of live Americans in Southeast Asia" from March 23, 1977 to date.

But the Intelligence Committee, in a closed session on Sept. 5, killed the resolution. Reading the minds of its 18 colleagues and detecting ulterior motives, the committee said the 18 wanted "free and easy access . . . to the files . . . [to] convince members of the House that there were Americans being held prisoner in Southeast Asia and persuade them that there was an institutional bias at DIA against accepting this fact."

Having exonerated the DIA of bias, the committee echoed the intelligence agency's "national security" phantom. But DIA files contradict the Intelligence Committee's complacent verdict that there is no cover-up at the Pentagon.

Item: In late April 1973, a refugee said he had seen about three dozen Caucasian POWs in an area from which 20 were later returned after the war. "The refugee undoubtedly saw the 20 U.S. returnees being moved from their camp," the DIA airily concluded. Forget the remaining dozen or so; they were bureaucratically eliminated in one short sentence.

Footnote: The prime sponsor of the disclosure resolution is Rep. William M. Hendon (R-N.C.), who worked for the DIA in 1983. Ironically, he has been denied access to files he saw as a consultant.